



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Childhood Memories – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. Kevin Leman and Dr. Randy Carlson

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- Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.
- Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. What if the earliest memories tucked away in your mind could actually tell you something important about who you are today. Well, that is the fascinating idea behind today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We're about to hear Dr. Dobson sitting down with psychologist Dr. Kevin Lehman and his co-author Dr. Randy Carlson to explore how our childhood memories shape our personality, our relationships, and even our parenting. Let's listen into this conversation right now on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.
- Dr. James Dobson: It's a real pleasure to have my good friend Dr. Kevin Leman with us. This time he's brought Randy Carlson. Gentlemen, welcome back.
- Dr. Kevin Leman: Good to be back here, Jim.
- Dr. Randy Carlson: Nice to be here.
- Dr. James Dobson: Dr. Kevin Leman is a graduate of the University of Arizona. As a USC graduate, I find that difficult to say.
- Dr. Kevin Leman: You said that well.
- Dr. James Dobson: Randy, you also graduated from the University of Arizona.
- Dr. Randy Carlson: So you're outnumbered at this point.
- Dr. James Dobson: You received your Ph.D. there. Randy, you received your B.A. there.
- Dr. Randy Carlson: I have a master's in marriage and family counseling.
- Dr. James Dobson: And you cooperated in the writing of this book. The name of it is *Unlocking the Secrets of Your Childhood Memories*. As a way of linking you, Kevin, to other people who have read your books in the past, let me say that you're the author of the *Birth Order* book and so many

others that we've talked about here. Let me begin with this question. When I was in graduate school, one of the books that got a lot of emphasis was called *Your Inner Child of the Past* by Missildine. You remember that? In this book, you sort of take-off where Missildine left off. Is that correct? You're dealing with some of the same concepts, aren't you?

Dr. Kevin Leman: I think some of the same context that Hugh Misseldine dealt with, but like I say, this book is unique, and it's so simple. Think of it this way: conjure up an early childhood memory out of your past, and we can tell you specifically how that memory affects your life today, how it'll affect who you might marry, the kind of job you might gravitate toward, the kind of problems you may have in the world in terms of relationships with other people. It even relates, Jim, to checking out your own child's self-esteem, a word that is thrown around an awful lot today.

Dr. James Dobson: And misunderstood a lot.

Dr. Randy Carlson: Of the millions of things that happened to us before the age of 10, we selectively go back and pick out only those memories which are consistent with the way we view life today. We call that creative consistency in the book because when we go back there, we're going to find that those little stories and the emotion that we attach to those stories are very significant in revealing our personality.

Dr. James Dobson: If I had to put the book into a couple of sentences, one of them would be, and you tell me whether I've gotten the message or not, one of them is that you are the child you used to be.

Dr. Kevin Leman: True. The little boy or little girl you once were, you still are.

Dr. James Dobson: It's still in there someplace.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. A second one is that the memories that remain, those that you're aware of, those that you're able to recall, are consistent with how you view life.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Yes, exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: That's another theme.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Yeah. Let me share with you real quickly. When I was three years of age, my earliest memory, knocking on a door and having the door locked behind me, and I was pounding on the door and no one would hear me. And the embarrassing part was I had to go potty and I messed my pants. That's my first memory of life. And you say, well, pray tell, what could

that ever have to do with Kevin Leman's life? Jim, I graduated fourth in my class in high school. Unfortunately fourth in the bottom and not fourth in the top. The three guys beneath me were in woodshop, made the same bookcase year in and year out. And I applied to 160 colleges. None of them wanted me. Our church denominational school turned me down. I even sent them Scripture about forgiveness. They weren't impressed.

Dr. James Dobson: And obviously it didn't end there. You not only got into college, but you went on and earned a Ph.D.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Yes. But the interesting thing to me is I look back on my life. is that my entire life I've been knocking on doors. I grew up in a home with two other children. An older sister, Sally, who I'm very, very close to today and always have been. She's always been a special sister. But, Jim, this woman was a perfectionist, straight-A student, still today. You come to her home, and the first thing you see is the clear vinyl runner. You can take it to any room in the house. She irons a Davenport for pleasure on the weekends. Do you get the picture? She was a super achiever. And then there was my brother, who was the quarterback on the football team type. And then there was little Cubby. That was my nickname. And I was sort of written off in a sense. And I think in my mind, I looked up at those two successful people and said, I can't measure up that way. So I became the best at being the worst. I was the little show-off, almost a little brat, if I may say so, or a little jerk. That might even be more accurate. And so that knocking on the door is really symbolic of Kevin Leman's life.

Dr. James Dobson: So what you're saying is the memory from all of those possibilities that emerges and remains in the mind has implications for who you are and the way you see life.

Dr. Randy Carlson: Exactly. Kevin and I are total opposites, and our memories are totally opposite. I think back to one of my early memories, the fourth grade spelling bee. That was a terrible day, a terrible experience. And when they got to "C" for Carlson, I can still recall the teacher asking me to spell a one-syllable word. I misspelled it.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Tell them the word you blew.

Dr. Randy Carlson: The word was gang. I can still recall the word.

Dr. Kevin Leman: It's a tough word, Randy.

Dr. Randy Carlson: And the emotion that I have, how could you be so stupid to misspell that word? And I catch myself even today saying that to myself. How could you be so stupid? So I go back and pick out that memory because it's consistent with what I battle with as an adult.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, you were in the fourth grade, and that was one of your earliest memories? There's something significant right there. You were nearly 10 years old, and that's one of your earliest memories.

Dr. Randy Carlson: Well, I have others, but they're all very consistent with that same theme of not measuring up, feeling embarrassed, doing things that were not correct. And see, I've struggled with that through my life. And God's given me victory in that area, but that's consistent with how I view life. We talk about the grain of wood. I'll fall back to that grain of wood if I'm not careful.

Dr. Kevin Leman: See, I have a gymnasium memory that's quite different than Randy's in the spelling bee in that I was a mascot of the cheerleaders. My older sister Sally was the captain, so I had that natural in. And I was out there leading a cheer and forgot what I was supposed to do and stood there like a dumb bunny. And remember, looking up into the crowd of people, feeling slightly embarrassed. But what I remember, and that's what we say in this book, is attach a feeling to the memory, because that's really important. And the feeling was, hey, this isn't so bad. See, that's what I retain from that memory. And I go back to just about a year ago, I was a guest on Sally Jesse Raphael's show. And they made the mistake, Jim, of bringing on two other psychologists with me. And they sit you up there like three little crows on a fence.

Dr. James Dobson: I've been in that situation.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Yes, and you get a call, and we're talking about disciplining children. And a person called up, and the problem was that he wanted to know what to do about little Buford, age four, who was manhandling his \$1,200 stereo unit, poking his fingers in the speakers and climbing all over it. And this guy takes over, the psychologist who's touching my elbow or that close. And he says, "Oh, now wait a minute. Don't miss the opportunity to give your child the power of touch, to experience that, to feel that." And I'm thinking, wait a minute, wait a minute, hold on here.

Dr. James Dobson: Not my stereo.

Dr. Kevin Leman: I got \$1,200 stereo, and I got four kids and one wife, and do I want four-year-old Buford climbing all over it? So I begin to look to my right at the people in the studio, and they're beginning to roll their eyes like, I can't believe this guy. Well, without thinking, I mean, really, it was a knee-jerk reaction. Why this guy is speaking, I took my index finger in Joan Rivers style, and on national TV went, down my throat with this index finger. And, of course, Sally Jesse Raphael about died. But see, right there what happened, I go back to that gymnasium, and that little boy, that little Kevin Leman, jumped out. And so we say clearly that the things that you remember are significant in your life.

Dr. James Dobson: You quoted a conversation that you and I had about my early childhood in this book.

Dr. Randy Carlson: We did.

Dr. James Dobson: I found it interesting. You didn't get the facts entirely correct, but let me set them straight.

Dr. Kevin Leman: This is your opportunity.

Dr. James Dobson: My earliest remembrance was when I was under a year of age. I know that because I know the house that the memory occurred in, and it was in a bedroom, and I was in somebody's arms. And there was another person, I believe a woman, in the room. And I was eating pablum, because the smell of pablum today brings back that memory. And I had to be considerably under a year. It's the very earliest recollection that I have. And it is a warm one. I was being held, I was being fed, I was in the company of my family. And it was probably in my mother's arms, although I don't know who was holding me. But it's a good feeling. Draw meaning from that. What does that mean?

Dr. Kevin Leman: First of all, the fact that you could remember it that young says that you're a highly creative person. We call that whole general area crib memories. In other words, when you're in the crib or younger, those people who can bring those up are highly creative people. Number two, you mentioned smell. And we know that smells, textures, colors, as we hear those in memories, are just an indicator of how creative the person is. So we know one thing about Jim Dobson for sure, and that is the fact that he is, in fact, creative.

Dr. Randy Carlson: Two other things that jump out of that memory. One is the amount of detail. Jim Dobson is a detail person.

Dr. James Dobson: I wrote a memo some years ago here to the staff talking about the number of letters that we get and the number of requests that are made of us and that we can't drop one of them. Because if you drop one, somebody out there had a need that you didn't meet. And it doesn't matter if you met all the rest of them in that day if you drop that one for that person, then that person is hurt and loses confidence in you and you haven't met the need. And the name of that memo was "Detail, Detail, Detail."

Dr. Randy Carlson: That's consistent with the way you view life and the way you remember that particular incident in your life as a small boy, but also that what comes through is that warmth and the family and the touching and being close and secure. These are all very important elements of Dr. Dobson's life.

Dr. James Dobson: I have in front of me a copy of your book on page 180 where that memory is described. And you said, "Most important, however, are the feelings he attaches to that memory, warmth, comfort, and security in his mother's arms. It is no coincidence today that over 50 years later, Dr. James Dobson's life is dedicated to the preservation of the family and helping parents learn how to communicate the same kind of love to their own children." How soft a science is this? Are you guys looking at me now and saying, aha, we can see how there's a relationship between what we see today and what he's telling us about his first memory?

Dr. Kevin Leman: Oh, yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Or is there really a linkage? Could you do it prospectively? Could you predict from that early memory?

Dr. Kevin Leman: Yeah, you really can. Let me give you another famous person. I won't tell you who this person is, but think about it. And here's the memory paraphrased. He says, and this person is dead, I should add this, dead and everyone in the world knows who this person was. He says, "I remember being beaten by my father and I remember vowing to myself never to cry again. And so I sat there silently counting the blows as my father beat my body." Now, is that the kind of person that you want to have live next door to you, Jim Dobson?

Dr. James Dobson: Hardly. Would that have been Adolf Hitler?

Dr. Kevin Leman: Adolf Hitler, sure. And contrast that with Corrie ten Boom's first memory, and that is of watching an ugly and scraggly-looking child being carried into Master Robin's classroom. And she said, "I felt so sorry for him. I felt so much compassion for him." Now, when you look at those two, very distinctly different memories. And you look at the course of those people's lives. And of course, Corrie ten Boom hid the Jews out at the risk of her own life and the lives of her family members.

Dr. Randy Carlson: And the power in all of this is it helps us reveal who we are today. And then in turn, we can apply this to relationships.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, the examples that you all are giving are primarily negative, and many in the book are negative. My early memories are nearly all positive. They're warm. At three years of age, I have a flood of memories at three and a number of them at two, and they're warm memories. Is that unusual from your perspective?

Dr. Kevin Leman: It is unusual because we live in a society where we're sort of trained to spot a flaw at 50 yards and then we see it and we pounce on it and beat the person up for being imperfect like the rest of us. What's disturbing is that Randy and I have been all over this country, and we have yet to

hear a memory of someone's experience with God at an early age, in a positive sense. We've heard some negative ones, but we haven't heard a positive one yet. That's what's disturbing. And I'm telling you, there are people listening to us today who are terrible procrastinators. They put things off, they run right to the finish line on a project, turn left or turn right. And they don't realize it, but the secret, the secret to why they behave that way is locked in their early childhood memory. And you asked before about being predictive. Can these things be predictive? They sure can be. Because that person who has a critical father, the woman who has a critical father, I need to underscore that, the woman who has a critical father is going to end up with behavior that's going to be very consistent with that of a procrastinator. In other words, again, we have to underscore the tremendous, profound relationship that exists between a father and a daughter and a mother and a son.

Dr. Randy Carlson: And when we bring this into our parenting responsibilities... It can be a very powerful tool to help understand your children.

Dr. James Dobson: The title of your book is *Unlocking the Secrets of Your Childhood Memories*. So you're recommending that you not only try to recall those early experiences, but try to explain them, try to understand them.

Dr. Randy Carlson: To understand that they are the fingerprint of our personality. And that once we understand that, we can put that information to work in our relationships.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me give you my first recollection of my father with whom I had a notoriously good relationship, and you tell me what the meaning of it is. This is my, I believe, the first time he ever entered into my life that I can recall. It was at the end of the day, and my dad was a minister, and he'd been at the church all day. And he knocked on the front door instead of coming through it. And I was the one that went and opened the door for him. And when I opened the door, he had a smile on his face, and he said, "come with me". And he took me around the side of the house, and there was a brand new big blue tricycle there. And it was one exciting moment. As far as the surprises of my life, that one probably ranks near the top in terms of sheer delight.

Dr. Randy Carlson: Well, let me jump in first, Kevin, and take it in chronological order. The first thing that jumped out was you remembering you taking responsibility to open that door. Dr. Dobson takes responsibility. And if a door has to be open, you're going to open it. And you're going to be willing to see what's on the other side and deal with what's on the other side by taking that responsibility.

Dr. James Dobson: I don't remember whether my mother told me to. That part of the memory is gone. But all I know is I opened the door.

Dr. Kevin Leman: The other thing that's significant is your father smiled. And again, we say in the book, we pay attention, see, Jim Dobson, to the words you choose to give us your memory. And you say, "and my father smiled, and he said, 'come with me.'" I would contend that your father smiling and saying, "come with me," is more significant than maybe you realize. It wasn't just to see the new bike.

Dr. James Dobson In other words, that characterized our relationship at that time.

Dr. Kevin Leman: So we are wired by a mighty God who's given us a brain that's unbelievable, and everything is locked in there. And the neat thing about early childhood memories, even for the young person today who's, you know, walking through the swamp of life looking for that proverbial prince or princess that their mother or grandmother told them about. You know, when somebody asks you out to dinner, it might be a real good idea to say, yeah, I'd love to go to dinner, but would you mind if I ask you just one question? What are three of your earliest childhood memories of life?

Now, that might sound a little stupid on the surface, but I'll tell you. Supposing this young woman asked that question, and this young guy comes up with three negative memories, all concerning his mother. Guess who is going to pay for that? The lucky woman who walks down the flower-strewn aisle. That's who.

Dr. James Dobson: You don't see a danger in trying to be a pop psych here and try to draw too much meaning from those early stories.

Dr. Kevin Leman: I think that's a valid criticism. But I think that my experience has been that in 20 years now, I've used our early childhood memories. And I use them on purpose, for a reason. When someone comes to my office and the door closes, one of the first things we get squared away is, "hey, I want to get rid of you. I don't want you hanging around my office forever." And so we use the early childhood memory to go back and get behind someone's eyes and see how they view life. That's all we're trying to do.

Dr. Randy Carlson: When I think of my parents, who are still alive, and I love them dearly, but they've always been very much of an authority figure in my life. I never really got to know them as they see life. And the genesis of this book was really an outgrowth of spending an evening with my parents. And I asked my mother, I said, "Mother, what do you remember?" And she's the baby of nine children. And here's the story she gave me. She said, "We grew up during the Depression. We didn't have any money, and I wanted a China doll so badly. I knew we couldn't afford it. And my parents saved pennies and nickels and dimes all year long and purchased for me a beautiful China doll for Christmas." And she lit up as

she shared this story. And she said, "I remember the day I unwrapped it under the Christmas tree, and I cherished that thing." She said, "I wrapped it up and put it in the box and put it up on the shelf. And then one day I reached for it. It fell out of my hands and broke." Tears came to her eyes at that point as she's sharing a memory from 60 years ago. And she said, "Randy, that's what my life has been, a series of broken dolls."

And we shared a little bit about how she has struggled with that and as a believer has overcome that in her life. And for her and for me, that became a real bonding point. And it wasn't pop psychology. It was just a beautiful relationship. And so we look at early memories as an opportunity to get close to other people and to understand ourselves better.

Dr. Kevin Leman:

What's sort of fun to see is that you take a situation today that everybody today that I talk to, particularly moms and dads, are concerned about their child's self-esteem. And they call me up on the phone. They say, "Oh, Dr. Leman, could you see little Harlan? We're so worried. He seems so negative." And the worst thing you can do for many young children is to grab them and take them off to some shrink's office. And I really do mean that. I think we overdo that. So again, we're trying to play down, run to your shrink. We're trying to say, hey, solve some problems in the home the best you can.

But one of the things that Randy and I have talked about is it's really fun. You can get a pulse beat of where your child is today by simply sitting around the dinner table and saying, "Hey, kids, what do you remember about being a little kid? What are some of your early memories of life?" And the kids are not going to pull up the time you took them to Disneyland or Disney World. That's not going to happen. What's going to happen is they're going to come up with this little seemingly benign memory. Now, I have four children. One of whom, Holly, our oldest, is 16 years of age and driving. We did this in our home about three weeks ago. And Holly, our oldest daughter, says, "Oh, I know. I remember now." And she points her finger at her mother. And she says, "It was you, Mom. You wanted me to wear this little red sweater with silver buttons on it." And the woman who made the sweater was coming to dinner. You know how mothers are. Well, anyway, Holly took one look at this little red sweater with silver buttons and said, no, at age three and a half. Now, my wife, who did not read my book, I should point out, went and got some candy and she held it out, some little Reese's pieces. And she said, "Holly, if you just wear that sweater for dinner, after dinner, mommy will give you this candy as a treat." Holly looked at it. And again, we ask in the book, attach a feeling to the memory. And I say, "Holly, what was your feeling?" She says, "I remember seeing the candy and thinking, 'oh, I want that candy so bad."

But I'm not going to wear that red sweater for anything or anybody.'" Now, that's her feeling.

Now, I have with me, in Holly's handwriting, her 13 rules governing the use of the family car. I mentioned she's 16 and driving. Rule number one, I will at all times be a cautious and responsible driver. Driving like there's a cop behind me at all times. Number two, everyone must wear a seatbelt. Number three, there'll be no loud music played. Number four, I will never be under the influence of anything. Now, this kid, Jim, is the next Judge Wapner. There is consistency in that little childhood memory, see? And what I'm saying is a parent can get a pulse beat of where their child is at during those tough hormone years or whatever. If they'll just tune in and listen to the early childhood memory.

Dr. James Dobson: And it starts wonderful conversations around the table too, doesn't it?

Dr. Kevin Leman: Well, yeah, because with those kids, if you ask them a simple question like, "Hey, where you been?" "Out." "What'd you do?" "Nothing." I mean, it's sort of a joy to open up those new avenues of communication.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's open up some more of these avenues of communication tomorrow. Let's talk some more about your book, *Unlocking the Secrets of Your Childhood Memories*. Dr. Kevin Leman and Randy Carlson. Appreciate you guys being here. If you can tell it to Donahue, you can tell it to me.

Dr. Randy Carlson: It's our privilege.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Thanks.

Dr. James Dobson: We'll talk some more next time.

Roger Marsh: The memories we carry from childhood run deeper than we realize. They quietly shape the way we love, the way we lead, and the way we parent. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, featuring part one of Dr. Dobson's conversation with Drs. Kevin Leman and Randy Carlson. If you'd like to hear today's program again, you can go to jdfi.org. Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we are committed to preserving and promoting the institution of the family and the biblical principles upon which it is based. These programs that you hear are made possible by the generous support of friends like you, and your gift of any amount helps us continue reaching families all across America with trusted biblical wisdom. To make a secure donation, visit jdfi.org. You can also call a member of our constituent care team at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or to send your contribution through the U.S. Postal Service, our ministry mailing

address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for part two of this fascinating conversation featuring Dr. Kevin Leman and Dr. Randy Carlson discussing childhood memories. That's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.